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STORYTELLING AND ITS PLACE
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

by
Stella M. Boldrey

STORYTELLING AND ITS PLACE
IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Substantial Paper
Eastern Illinois University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education
Plan B

Course: Methods of Teaching Children's Literature

Instructor: Miss Merrilee Mather

Advisor: Dr. F.R. McKenna

by
Stella M. Boldrey

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This paper has been approved by the
following members of the faculty of
Eastern Illinois University.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
FOREWORD.....	ii
CHAPTER 1. HISTORY OF STORYTELLING.....	1
Early Storytellers.....	6
CHAPTER 2. TELLING VERSUS READING ALOUD.....	16
CHAPTER 3. WHY TELL STORIES TO CHILDREN.....	21
Storytelling and Discipline.....	21
Meeting Emotional Needs.....	21
Appreciation of Literature.....	23
Storytelling and Imagination.....	24
Moral and Ethical Values.....	26
Storytelling and Reading Readiness...	28
CHAPTER 4. SELECTION OF STORIES.....	33
What to Read to Children.....	33
Stories to Avoid.....	42
CHAPTER 5. TECHNIQUES OF STORYTELLING.....	46
Selection and Preparation.....	47
Presentation of the Story.....	53
CHAPTER 6. WHEN TO TELL STORIES.....	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	66

FOREWORD

Storytelling as an essential part of the educative process has been given very brief mention by most writers of textbooks on teaching in the primary grades. The reasons for the neglect are not all valid. Some of the reasons are discussed later in this work. Whatever the reasons are, and whether or not they are valid, the fact remains that stories are a means of communication, a means of transmitting ideas and feelings. Any plot or accumulation of incidents in a story reveals some phase of life. Education is concerned with life. The story may be pleasurable or otherwise. Perhaps the pleasurable aspect of the story has led to the belief that storytelling is merely entertainment, or largely entertainment, and adds little to the educational program. Pleasure is not the sole aim of life, not even the guide, but to primary children it is an index to most of their activities.

Since education depends largely upon communication and since storytelling is a means of communication, teachers might do well to consider the

educational value of the story in many areas of the curriculum. Stories can be correlated with virtually any curriculum area, not confined to those areas principally concerned with folk-lore, fiction, or other types of literature. There are fascinating stories to be used in correlation with geography, social studies, natural sciences, art, and music. Of course, there are books for the school child to read in these areas; but the greatest advantage of a story well told is that the power of the story is greatly magnified by the human voice.

The few authorities who have written books on the subject of storytelling and early storytellers seem to feel that storytelling has been neglected too long and that there are no true storytellers today except the professionals. Perhaps the primary teacher is the one who can do the most to bring about a revival of storytelling by using it as an educational method in daily classroom procedure.

In the following pages a brief history of storytelling and early storytellers is presented,

also some principles for guidance in the selection of stories to tell, some techniques to aid in preparation and presentation of the story, as well as arguments for the use of the story hour as part of the educational program in the primary grades.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORY OF STORYTELLING

It is difficult to say just when in the history of civilization storytelling began. In the beginning it was certainly no pen and ink affair. The first written record of storytelling is the collection of Egyptian tales on papyri known as "Tales of the Magicians," dating back possibly to 4000 B.C. It tells how the sons of Cheops, the great builder, entertained their¹ father with strange stories.

Richard T. Wyche says that although there are no written records of the origins of storytelling "probably all folk tales and epic stories can be traced back to the stories told by primitive man."² Perhaps prehistoric man battled with a wild beast, told and retold his story, adding, idealizing as time went by.

It is also Arthur Ransome's opinion that all of today's stories can trace their beginnings to two primitive tales: "Warning Examples naturally told by a mother to her children..." and the "Em-

1. Ruth Sawyer, The Way of the Storyteller (New York, 1948), page 60.

2. Richard Thomas Wyche, Some Great Stories and How to Tell Them (New York, 1910), page 4.

broidered ³Exploits" told by a boaster to his wife and friends. The mother would give her narrative realism and credibility by adding colorful touches. Early man told not only the bare facts of his encounters with the wild beasts of the forest; he embroidered his accounts.

At first there were no professional storytellers. Before long, whenever simple men were together relating experiences, there would be one whose stories were always the most realistic, the most pleasant, or the most adventurous. The discrepancies between the life of the storyteller and the life he recounted became greater as he retold the story with more embellishment. He preserved his modesty by crediting his tales to some ancestor, some god, or some strong man. Using his imagination, he achieved his position as an entertainer and even became known as the sage of his tribe. Men became heroes in the stories and the heroes became supernatural beings. The creator of the supernatural heroes became the professional storyteller of his day. The primitive storyteller also became the historian of his tribe. Gradually

3. Arthur Ransome, A History of Storytelling (London and Edinburgh, 1909), page 9.

the casual remembering and recounting of tales no longer satisfied the listeners. A feeling for historical record came into existence and it became apparent that one man would have to devote all of his time to the records of the tribe and its wanderings, and to perpetuating the names and deeds of the great ones of the tribe. Storytelling became an art, a serious art. The storyteller was relieved of all other duties and became the high priest, the medicine man, the shaman of his⁴ tribe.

When storytelling became a profession, the teller began to give more attention to ways of saying things, or as one would say, to the techniques of the art. Methods of presenting were given careful study. Stories were told for a definite purpose, "...to instill standards of conduct in the youth of the tribe...to inspire respect for elders."⁵ "Events which were fraught with meaning were kept alive in memory and handed down from one generation to another that they might help shape the life of youth."⁶

In Foote's comments on the characteristics

4. Sawyer, page 52.

5. Ibid., page 54.

6. Edward Porter St. John, Stories and Storytelling (Boston, 1910), page 2.

of early storytelling he states, "The impression grows as we look into the history of this art of storytelling that the mission of the story in the long ago was serious. In some places story hours opened with prayer. The storyteller believed what he told, else he could not have inspired belief."⁷

Wyche calls the stories these early storytellers wove "the epitome of the race life."⁸ The stories gave a picture of the people in prehistoric periods, their work, their welfare, home life, and social customs, their songs, folk lore and superstitions, the ideals that inspired them, the truths that they wrought out, the heroes that they worshiped, their yearnings and prayers, and their beliefs in the here and the hereafter.⁹

Ruth Sawyer draws a parallel between the development of an individual personality and the growth of the art of storytelling.¹⁰ Early childhood is chiefly concerned with self. As personality develops, the field of interest and awareness broadens and the family or tribe are included. The child is willing to listen as well as to tell. The third person is included in his discourse. Early

7. Francis E. Foote, "Suggestions in the Art of Storytelling," The Normal School Quarterly, (April 1914), page 1.

8. Wyche, page 12.

9. Ibid., pages 12-13.

10. Sawyer, page 45.

storytelling consisted of a simple chant, set to the rhythm of daily tribal occupations, grinding corn, scraping skins, or paddling a canoe. The chant was in first person, setting the individual apart from his tribesmen.

As leadership developed and civilization progressed the tribe or family was included. "As our primitive ancestors grew less subjective in their interests and curiosity they began to reach out of themselves toward life in general."¹¹ Third person narrative replaced the self-centered accounts of deeds and exploits. Storytelling became part of tribal entertainment. Stories were told after a successful hunt or during a feast. "Some became expert in the recital of stories, and as these tellers of tales sat around the fireside, or under the shade of trees, and looked into the rapt faces of the listeners, the deeds of men, monsters, and the phenomena of nature fused into one, and their work grew architectonic, the story taking on an¹² artistic form...."

Since word of mouth was the only means of handing down the stories, it was inevitable that

11. Ibid., page 50.

12. Wyche, page 4.

history and legend should be interwoven. The works of Homer and Vergil are an intermingling of fact and fancy growing out of a mass of material kept alive by recitation.¹³ The glory of civilization is in them. The early storyteller was poet as well as historian. The Illiad and the Odyssey presuppose a long ancestry of oral poetry. Much of this early poetry must have been lays of royal battle,¹⁴ but the Homeric epics refer to other types also.¹⁴

Early Storytellers

Thousands of years of storytelling preceded the use of clay tablets, so there must have been thousands of storytellers whose names were never written down, but whose work remains in the stories of Ulysses, Siegfried, Beowulf, King Arthur, St. George, the Kalevala and similar stories. Wyche calls these works "a picture of the primitive¹⁵ race."

"For centuries the stories of Homer formed the only literary content of education among the Greeks, and they kept their place through the succeeding years of a culture that we can hardly

13. Bess Porter Adams, About Books and Children (New York, 1953), page 309.

14. "Mythology and Literature", Cassell's Encyclopedia of World Literature, (New York, 1954), page 262.

15. Wyche, page 7.

equal today." ¹⁶ Tradition pictures the blind Homer wandering through ancient Greece 30 centuries ago, reciting the legends of the Trojan War and the ¹⁷ journeyings of Ulysses.

Scant records of Roman storytellers exist. The Romans distributed rather than created. Next to the Romans as distributors were the gypsies, probably Hindu in origin. Legends say the Romans were the children of Ishmael, son of Hagar. They were skillful storytellers and prophets as well as ¹⁸ coppersmiths, farriers, and horsebreakers.

"Jesus was a master storyteller...the common people heard him gladly....The stories inspired his followers so strongly that many of them found ¹⁹ place in the record of his life and teachings."

The history of storytelling in the Middle Ages is interwoven with the history of Europe and ²⁰ the men who made it. Storytelling relieved the tediousness of long journeys of pilgrims and Crusaders. Life in these times was precarious and the world snatched savagely at amusement and diversion. Trouveres and troubadours were "as thick as star-²¹lings." In the beginning trouveres were the com-

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- 16. St. John, page 2.
 - 17. Wyche, page 5.
 - 18. Sawyer, page 62.
 - 19. St. John, page 19.
 - 20. Sawyer, page 13.
 - 21. Ibid., page 69.

posers and troubadours were the reciters. Soon the two terms became synonymous. The troubadours sang chiefly of love as did the minnesingers of Germany. These "love-singers," the lyric poets of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries were supported by the people whom they entertained. With the age of chivalry the minstrels with their songs of noble deeds were honored for their influence upon character, and had a recognized place in the educational system of feudalism.²²

According to Foote, "Wherever we see the storyteller we see leadership, enthusiasm, and sympathy. Wherever we see his hearers they are eagerly listening and believing....it was the custom for the people to station sentries in the market places on the outskirts of the crowd, to maintain perfect quiet. So angry were the listeners at any disturbance that violence was sometimes used."²³

In France the troubadours and trouveres and minstrels lived in the luxury of the courts or wandered about in rags, exchanging stories and songs of Roland, Charlemagne, and the Crusaders for food and lodging. The itinerant storyteller

22. St. John, page 3.

23. Foote, page 1.

of the Middle Ages lived by the strength of what he told. Great ones were worth a king's ransom;
24
poor ones lived in holes like foxes.

All European peoples had their storytellers. The Aeolic minstrel of Greece and the scald of the North developed at two geographical extremes. The Nordic scalds related sagas of their heroes, stern, warlike men, the tales of whose deeds remind one
25
of the tales of the Brothers Grimm.

English bards kept alive the stories of popular heroes, records of victories, defeats, and important events. "All their songs were of the ballad-epic type. Music and verse were the adornment of the tale, and indeed served a more practical purpose than that, as they were an aid to memory before the songs were committed to writing."
26
The storytellers were welcomed by court and king, as well as by the common people. And "sometimes as one passed from one court to another, a chain
27
of gold hung about his neck as a royal gift."

All the King Arthur stories have^{slight} a basis in English history. The early stories have no element of Christianity. This element crept in

- 24. Sawyer, page 69.
- 25. Adams, page 310.
- 26. St. John, page 31.
- 27. Wyche, page 6.

about the twelfth century. The tales were carried to France by the wandering tale-tellers of the courts and there the Round Table was added to the cycle of stories. Later the same tales were carried to Ireland and grew rich with supernatural characters.

As early as the Roman Conquest the world honored the Irish storyteller. Scholars came from distant lands to study the secrets of storytelling and composition from the Gaelic ollamhs and the Cymric bards. These two schools of storytelling came into existence among kindred peoples and the professional storytellers now in existence in the west of Ireland had as their forerunners the ollamhs and seanachies of hundreds of years earlier.

Each clan had its ollamhs or seanachies. The seanachies were the masters of the historical tale. Each must master 178 tales, embracing a number of topics. The loidhes, or hero sagas, were chanted in the Gaelic five-note scale, and²⁸ eerie motif. Ollamhs were trained as poets, historians, judges, storytellers, writers of epics, and recorders of genealogies.

28. Sawyer, page 65.

Scholars came from far lands to study with the ollamhs and the seanachies. An apprentice served first one master, then another. A master "owned" certain stories which the apprentices could not repeat without his permission. After mastering the trade, some of the scholars returned to their homelands; others stayed to become seanachies.

The importance of storytelling to the Gaelic peoples is shown in the fact that each year warring clans declared a truce during which storytelling contests were held. Each clan sent its leading seanachies to compete.

Wales also had its school of storytellers. The leader of the Welsh bards was the pinkerdd. The apprentices were the mabinogs. A pinkerdd was assigned to the 10th chair from the king. He was under the king's immediate protection from the time he began his first recitation to the last. He alone was privileged to take his storytelling position in the front of the hall. The apprenticed mabinogs had to tell their tales from the back of the hall.

These storytellers of Europe Wyche calls³⁰ "true teachers and poets." Storytelling and storytellers do not hold the place of importance today that they once were given. Ransome says that outside of books storytelling has only a shamefaced existence.

Storytelling and Education

What is the place of storytelling in today's educational program? Edward St. John says, "The very origin of storytelling was in the teaching impulse."³¹ In the words of Richard T. Wyche, "The spoken word has more life than the printed page. Literature was at first vocal and nature's plan has suggested the method for the education of the child today and the stories she [sic] used have become in turn the stories for the children of today."³²

Today's schools depend heavily on the printed word, especially for the great literature that is presented to the students. Ruth Sawyer calls the taking of a story from the lips of the storyteller and "impaling" it on a clay tablet or on

30. Wyche, page 607.

31. St. John, page 2.

32. Wyche, page 7.

the printed page, a "kind of death" to the story, and in Miss Sawyer's words, "only by lifting the story again from its 'tomb' can it be recreated³³ into living substance."

Today every man is his own storyteller. There is no elect. Each storyteller has within reach of his own hand and imagination a treasure house of material stored through 6000 years. Every teacher of little children, who wants to give to them the fullest, richest experiences that can come to them through literature, will make herself, if not a master, at least an apprentice in the art of storytelling.

Beyond the kindergarten, the school has not made enough use of storytelling for pure enjoyment and appreciation. Too much analysis and critical study, insistence that the child give back the story, and using the story which has been told by the teacher as a basis for oral or written language work, have tended to dull any emotional or aesthetic reactions which might³⁴ have resulted. Even in the kindergartens of the United States little emphasis has been placed on

33. Sawyer, page 59.

34. Paul Monroe, Encyclopedia of Education (Chicago, 1911), pages 425 ff.

the teacher-told story. In her description of the work of the kindergarten in Monroe's Encyclopedia of Education, Annie E. Moore mentions the art of storytelling in the brief sentence: "And sometimes stories were told."³⁵

Storytelling has been neglected, probably for three reasons. It is generally assumed that independent reading provides enough contacts with literature. The difficulty of preparation of teachers for a program of studies not covered by standardized materials and procedures, and the time consumed in the preparation have not left teachers the time for learning the stories they might wish to tell. The increased emphasis on child participation in the classroom has made teachers hesitate to use their own art. But storytelling is making a comeback, in the library story-hour, on the professional stage, and in the classroom, and needs to be encouraged. As a means of presenting literature at its best, storytelling has definite advantages. This art is adaptable to the needs of large and small groups. It is immediately available and uses the

35. Ibid., page 425.

minimum of equipment. The social reactions accompanying the shared experience are not readily secured through other activities in literature.

CHAPTER 2

TELLING VERSUS READING ALOUD

Both storytelling and reading aloud are ancient forms of entertainment. Skillful use of either requires similar skills and techniques. The criteria for the selection of stories for reading aloud and for telling are principally the same. Although both are effective in the hands of a skillful performer, the art of storytelling is the more effective of the two. It is the oldest of the arts and the most informal. May Hill Arbuthnot calls it the "art of the fireside," not of the stage. A closer, more intimate relationship exists between the children and the teacher when a story is told rather than read from a book. The teacher can look directly into the children's faces, sensing their reactions, discovering doubts and misunderstandings. When a blank look on the face of a listener shows the storyteller that a point has not been made clear or that a word arouses curiosity, she can paraphrase or amplify until the bewildered look is replaced by one of comprehension. The small

child may be confused in hearing "The Travels of a Fox," by the sentence "...and the ox gored him." If the teacher paraphrases, "...and the ox gored him with his horns," the meaning becomes clear.

The younger the children, the more need for telling rather than reading. It is especially good for little children in school for the first time. Good storytelling is conversational, humorous, or grave according to the tale, and the personality of the teller is woven into the story.

When telling a story the teacher is unhampered by the book. She is free to gesture, to move about. She is at liberty to modify or simplify the story, at the same time retaining the basic action and spirit of the tale. Folk tales were created orally and are still more effective if told. Most fairy tales, legends, and nature stories and some others can be most effective if told in the narrator's own words. Any primary teacher can tell "The Three Little Pigs" or "The Three Billy Goats Gruff", as they

are simple in plot and easy to tell. After a few hearings the smallest children will be telling the stories themselves.

The busy teacher may feel that she has not the time to prepare stories for telling. May Hill Arbuthnot suggests that the teacher build up a storehouse of stories by learning a few each year. Since the children usually move from one teacher to another each year, the stories may be repeated every year. Small children even enjoy having the same story told over and over. The chore of hunting up a book when the occasion for a story arises is eliminated.

Whether to read aloud or tell the story depends partly upon the teacher's gift for narration. The choice also depends upon the story. Even the youngest children should hear some stories read from the book. Picture-story books, or stories in which the charm is dependent upon the exact wording of the author, should be read, or memorized word for word. Some picture stories which should be read as the pictures

are shown are Angus and the Ducks, by Marjorie Flack, The Tale of Peter Rabbit, by Beatrix Potter, and possibly There's No Such Animal, by Alf Evers. Several of Wanda Gag's books are better told as the pictures are shown.

Any story which would suffer by a change in wording, or in which the quality of appeal depends on the literary style, is better read, or told in the exact words of the author. Memorizing is never storytelling, but becomes too formal, unless done by a talented actor or actress who can memorize and recreate. Marie³⁶ Shedlock did this to perfection. However good a teacher might be at this type of art, it is hardly the style for the small informal audience of the schoolroom. Some stories which are usually considered better read than told because of wording and style are Winnie, the Pooh, Wind in the Willows, Alice in Wonderland, Many Moons, Just So Stories, Jungle Book, The Cat Who Went to Heaven, Voyages of Doctor Dolittle, The³⁷ White Stag, and Call It Courage.

The best translations of Hans Christian

36. May Hill Arbuthnot, Children and Books (Chicago, 1947) page 242.

37. Adams, page 318.

Andersen's literary fairy tales have a matchless style and must be memorized or read, as they lose too much if tampered with.

CHAPTER 3

WHY TELL STORIES TO CHILDREN

Storytelling and Discipline

Storytelling is an aid to discipline.

The happiest classroom, and the one in which the most learning takes place, is probably the one in which a happy relationship between teacher and pupil, between pupil and pupil, has been established. Relaxation of tensions, fears, and emotions that may disrupt learning can be brought about by the teacher who has at her command a fund of good stories to tell or read. She may settle a dispute, quiet an argument, make an ethical point, or bring laughter into a strained atmosphere. The happy and relaxed relationship resulting from sharing a skillfully told story carries beyond the story hour to other classroom activities.

Meeting Emotional Needs

Children's emotional needs may be satisfied through stories. Much is said and written today about satisfying the basic needs of children and adapting the school curriculum to fit those needs.

All teachers realize the importance of balancing the school program according to children's emotional needs if well-rounded personalities are to be developed and if children are to be helped to live happily with themselves and with one another. Surely it is as much through the best in literature, as well as in music and the other arts, that these needs can be met. Every child needs, for example, to some degree, an escape now and then from the commonplace, just a few minutes retirement from the utilitarian routine of the day. What could be more effective than a well-chosen, well-told tale, shared in an informal story hour?

Children can be helped to find satisfying solutions to their own life problems through stories of men and women who have struggled to overcome handicaps and who have reached their goals in spite of obstacles. No doubt many children who lacked self-confidence, self-reliance, or courage have had had their emotional status bolstered through the tales of David and Goliath, Tiny Tim, or even the Ugly Duckling.

Appreciation of Literature

Stories told by a teacher who really loves the best in literature can do much to instill in the primary child a similar love and appreciation. Storytelling and reading aloud make understanding and enjoyment of certain types of literature easier, and encourage children to read material they might not otherwise attempt. May Hill Arbuthnot in her discussion of "Why Tell Stories," in the Arbuthnot Anthology of Children's Literature,³⁸ says that not many average American children would attempt to read Kenneth Grahame's Wind in the Willows for themselves. Some critics might say, "Then why not discard such a book?" Shall we discard the best in music because the average ear is not so attuned as to appreciate it? Certainly not! Begin in appreciation of literature, as in appreciation of music and art, where the child is and lead him to the highest level which he is capable of attaining. Teachers and parents should never be satisfied that children read "something"--perhaps comics and the newspapers--but should ex-

38. Arbuthnot, "Telling Stories and Reading Aloud to Children," in Arbuthnot's Anthology, pages ii-ix.

pose them to the wealth of good literature that can be had if one knows what to look for.

Storytelling and Imagination

A further argument for the telling of stories to young children is the stimulating effect on the imagination. Edwin A. Kirkpatrick has devoted an entire book to the theme Imagination and its Place in Education,³⁹ in which he discusses fully the use and training of the imagination to facilitate the learning process. In listening to stories Kirkpatrick says the child understands what he hears only by comparing the objects and incidents mentioned with those in his experience. As he constructs images he is using his creative imagination, and the characters and events become real to him. Carolyn Sherwin Bailey calls this process "association of ideas." "A good fairy story is the best stimulus to a child's imagination."⁴⁰ Not just any fairy story, but one well-chosen! The child who can image the unreal, and feel with another personality that which he has not experienced himself, is using his creative imagination

39. Edwin A. Kirkpatrick, Imagination and its Place in Education (Chicago, 1920).

40. Carolyn Sherwin Bailey, For the Storyteller (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1913), page 214.

to the fullest. Miss Bailey suggests that in using fairy stories to stimulate the imagination, the chosen story must have in its make-up such a series of familiar images that the child's imagination can build upon those known ideas.

If only one reason for telling stories were offered, to say that stories should be told to children because stories give pleasure would be sufficient reason. Angela M. Keyes says, "... joy appears to be here to stay....American civilization is looking hopefully to the schools for better...standards of pleasure. The school is under obligation to educate the children to enjoyment of wholesome pleasure." ⁴¹ Stories that appeal to the senses stimulate the imagination and are sure to be enjoyed. The story of the "Gingerbread Boy" no doubt owes part of its popularity with small children to the fact that almost every boy or girl who hears it recalls eating, or wanting to eat, a gingerbread boy. The tragic end of the runaway is extremely satisfying; after all, what are gingerbread boys for if not to be eaten! Nursery rhymes and

41. Angela M. Keyes, Stories and Story-telling (New York and London, 1916), page 5.

jingles, perhaps a child's first introduction to literature, abound in characters who are eating, drinking, smelling, all familiar sensations, mostly pleasurable, on which the child can build new and satisfying experiences in his imagination. Not so pleasurable, but surely understood and appreciated are the sensations experienced through hearing the story "The Little Match Girl," in which the heroine suffers winter's bitter cold.

Moral and Ethical Values

Early literature for children provided a copious supply of stories intended primarily for teaching a moral or ethical principle. The moral was plainly pointed out, and the listener was well aware that the story was not for his entertainment, but for the "good of his soul." Writers for children no longer make the moral or ethical lesson the highlight of the story. The moral is veiled, and well that it is. It should be so well hidden, while at the same time being made so obvious by the suspensive treatment and climax of the

story, that the child makes the principle his own and applies it to his own thoughts and actions. Some of Hans Christian Andersen's literary tales are highly moralized. The morals in "The Emperor's New Clothes" and "The Nightingale" are not objectionably intrusive. They are clouded by the romance of China, an emperor and all that royalty implies. The moral does not detract from the fascination of the story. "The Swineherd,"⁴² which is not considered one of Andersen's best, involves the principle of poetic justice. The magic of the story conceals the moral. The Princess refuses the rose and the nightingale offered by the handsome Prince, but covets the magic pot and is willing to kiss the dirty swineherd to get it; the swineherd, the Prince in disguise, refuses her.

Pinocchio's long nose, which grew longer with every lie he told, amuses children and at the same time they are fully aware of the moral underlying the humor of the story. It is not necessary to put the moral into words.

42. The stories "The Emperor's New Clothes", "The Nightingale", and "The Swineherd" can be found in Johnson, Scott, and Sickel's Anthology of Children's Literature (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1948).

If a story is told for the purpose of inculcating in the listener a moral value or an ethical principle, the teller should make it a point not to take sides in any discussion which may take place after the telling. Let the characters in the story be judged by their deeds, and leave the children free to make their own decisions. Some stories in which "Virtue is its own reward," should be included in every storyteller's repertoire.

Froebel said that the sensitiveness of a child's mind is offended if the moral is forced upon him. If he absorbs it unconsciously, he has received its influence for life.

Storytelling and Reading Readiness

Another reason for telling stories to children is that both reading aloud and telling are favorable to the learn-to-read program, or call it the readiness program, if by that term one means readiness in the sense that readiness is an on-going process, not just a condition necessary to the reading program in the first weeks of school; or, one might say that readiness is

a condition of being made ready to move from one level of reading to another higher level. All normal children, bright or dull, good readers or poor, need to have their interests expanded. Small children, as well as adults, get into ruts in their reading habits. Some want all one kind of story, some another. A very firmly rooted dislike of other types of stories can be changed to avid interest by means of a story skillfully told . A technique which is usually successful in stimulating an interest in literature is to tell a story up to a certain point then let the children go on alone. Many good teachers of literature use this technique to introduce the King Arthur, Robin Hood, or Siegfried cycles of stories. Titles of books may cause children to shy away from them instead of inviting them to read. In one school-room A Child's Geography of the World sat on the library shelf for weeks untouched until the teacher suspected that the title sounded too much like that of a textbook to attract a reader. After the first chapter was read aloud

to a delighted audience, the book was in constant demand. The same procedure made A Child's History of the World an equally popular choice.

Someone might say, "Why not let the child make an effort himself to broaden his interests instead of someone's doing it for him? Cannot storytelling and reading aloud become substitutes for reading?" They could, if carried to extremes. Storytelling and reading aloud should be special treats, not commonplace experiences; they should be bait to expanded experiences.⁴³

All teachers of reading are aware of the lag that exists between the ability of a child to read for himself and his capacity to understand and enjoy literature. This lag exists for all except a few older and superior readers. A lag of from one to three years has been found to exist between reading skill and the level of appreciation. Even the casual observer can see it if he will watch the pleasure a child gets from movies and television and will compare the material enjoyed with the reading material

43. Arbuthnot, Anthology, page ii.

the child is capable of handling with any degree of pleasure. The poorer the reader the more frustrating this lag becomes. The child loses interest in reading unless his interest is captivated and stimulated through some means. No other means has been proven as successful as reading and telling stories to him. It is especially important, too, when so much that is below the best is available and constantly put before the child, that he should be exposed to the best in literature in the stories that are told and read to him.

The teacher who shows, in her narration of a story, the appreciation and pleasure that she receives from experiencing and sharing the experience with her listeners, gives the child the idea that reading can be fun for him, too; and, although the child will not realize it, the ease and fluency with which the teacher tells the story will convince him that reading must be easy.

One of the greatest aids to learning that any learner brings into a teaching-learning

situation is the power of listening carefully. This power of aural concentration develops through hearing well-read or well-told stories. Ears and mind focus on the spoken word. Some master storytellers disavow the use of pictures or other aids and prefer that the ear not be distracted by appeal to the eye. Children of today especially need to concentrate on listening. Learning a language requires good aural habits. Connections must be made within the brain as the ear hears the sounds. Growth of vocabulary and growth in ability to understand and react without visual symbols come through listening with one's whole power. The spoken word is easier to recognize in print. Although the prime objective in reading aloud or telling stories to children should never be to aid in recognition of the printed word, no doubt hearing the word makes its recognition in print easier. The speaking vocabulary can be increased by listening. Not the least of the values of listening is a growing recognition and appreciation of the power and beauty of language.

CHAPTER 4

SELECTION OF STORIES

Many kinds of stories should be selected for telling and reading aloud: factual stories, scientific stories, adventure tales, stories of animals, biographies, humorous tales, folk tales, and others. Some stories may be selected for their relation to a topic being studied in history or some other subject area. Most teacher's manuals suggest suitable stories to correlate with units of study. The program of telling should be balanced. Listening can be made educational as well as enjoyable. Standards for selection should be high if the time and effort spent in preparing material for telling is to be justified.

What to Read or Tell to Children

44

Jenny Lind Green, in Reading For Fun, suggests the following types of stories that children like to read, and these descriptions might also be applied to what they like to hear:

1. Stories that have strong plots leading to a swift climax.

44. Jenny Lind Green, Reading For Fun (Boston, 1925), pages 31-34.

2. Stories about people their own age.
3. Stories about animals, birds, and things.
4. Stories about animals they know, rather than ones they do not know.
5. Stories in which the characters get into difficulties and out again.
6. Stories in which the characters solve their own problems.

Ruth Sawyer, a professional storyteller, describes stories, or types of stories, that⁴⁵ have universal appeal to children:

1. Stories that make for wonder. These make children use their imagination creatively. The child's world is more of a make-believe or play world than most adults can conceive. The world of wonder and imagination is real to all except the dull child with a prosaic mind.
2. Stories that make for laughter. The value of humor should not be underrated. Laughter can wipe out all the

45. Sawyer, pages 157-158.

worries and anxieties that beset even the youngest school child. Laughter is the undisputed right of childhood.

3. Stories that bring about an understanding of courage, love, and beauty. Great literature abounds in this type of story. "The Tin Soldier," one of Andersen's best, is a marvelous example of this type of story.
4. Stories that bring out reverence, mercy, loyalty, and respect for what is good and true.
5. Stories that tell of adventure, daring, grim determination, and the capacity to see danger through to the end.

All the types of stories described above can be found in our great wealth of folk literature. The modern story must be carefully sifted to find these qualities. Cheapness, mediocrity in form and language, smugness, overstress of certain attitudes, stories that overexercise virtue, godliness, and moral values are revolting to the honest heart of a child.

Every would-be storyteller should work with more than one type of story. Folk literature, stories of individual writers, and selections from a full-sized book balance the program. The latter of these three types is often a stimulus to further exploration on his own on the part of the listener.

One who is just beginning to learn to tell stories could select no better tales than those from folk literature. The folk tale is the easiest to apprehend; the language is simple and strong; the tale is unquestionable in its appeal. Hero tales are the hardest to tell. Often the language of the hero tale does not come easily from the lips of the storyteller. Hero tales are often too dramatically exciting for the younger children. It is difficult to bring out that the bloodiness and wild excitement are not the most noteworthy elements in the hero tales. These qualities may quite overshadow the elements of courage and self sacrifice. Folk tales are of a firmly knit universal form. Each consists of three distinct parts: (1) a short introduction,

(2) direct and sequential action cumulative up to a climax, and (3) a brief summary. The tale leaves the listener completely satisfied. This form is especially successful with younger children.

Also especially appealing to the youngest children are those stories which have an element of the familiar. The very young mind is free of clutter, not crowded with concepts. Those he has can be built upon, new ones formed, and the imagination called into play. In "The Three Bears" the child visualizes home, beds, chairs for each individual member of the family, bowls of soup, all common to his daily life. A strong bond of sympathy is formed between the small child and the characters in the story. He readily accepts the "talking" of the bear family because of the natural kinship he has with animals.

Stories which have an element of the unusual appeal to the child who is bored with his own deeds and experiences and demands to be removed (in spirit) from his daily routine. For

all ages of listeners the storyteller should try to introduce some stories that call forth a love of beauty. Bible stories and poetry satisfy the natural aesthetic needs of children. If it is possible to weave a bit of good poetry into the story, never let the opportunity pass. Marie Shedlock gives an example of using Christina Rossetti's "Milking Time," to add human⁴⁶ interest to a tale.

Every storyteller's repertoire should include stories illustrating the importance of common sense and resourcefulness. Folk tales telling of the successful younger son, the animals that "used their heads," and the simpleton who turned out to be not so simple after all, delight and satisfy small listeners. In "The House in the Wild Wood," by the Brothers Grimm, the fate of the bad wolves, the wicked robbers, completely satisfies the audience. Children would have it no other way than that the mistreated animals should "live happily there to this day." The triumph of the dullard who used common sense to overcome his difficulties, the

46. Marie Shedlock, The Art of the Storyteller (Dover, 1951), page 74.

rich reward received by a poor girl for her kindness to animals, these fill a deep need that most children seem to have. Perhaps for some children the feelings they share with the story characters compensate for feelings of frustration or of being unjustly treated by parents or playmates.

Stories of gnomes, fairies, dwarfs, and brownies cause little children to wonder, to dream, to share in the mysticism which is an antidote to the prosaic and commercial tendencies of today's world.

Still another type of story which provides pure relaxation is the nonsense story or verse. Edward Lear's Nonsense Rhymes are enjoyed by all ages. The ridiculous cutting open of the Wolf and the subsequent sewing up again by Mother Goat after her kids have been set free satisfy the small hearer, who knows, of course, that the greedy Wolf gulped the kids down without chewing them properly. The audience can laugh heartily at the clumsy Wolf whose belly sags dangerously with the stones

that are sewn up inside.

These same children who so thoroughly enjoyed the fate of the villian in the story "The Wolf and the Kids" share a natural kinship with the good animals. Even the very small ones understand talking pigs and ducks. It does not seem at all unusual to them that the chant,

"I roll and they run.

This is my kind of fun!"

comes from the lips of Johnny Cake as he rolls along. Indian stories furnish excellent material for fostering this kinship with animals.

Nature stories in the form of myths can give the child a deep appreciation of nature if told successfully. Miss Shedlock cautions the storyteller to be careful of their use. The proper mood is necessary if they are to be fully appreciated.

Other stories which teachers may hesitate to use are those in which the "good" characters meet violent death. Shall we change "Little Red Riding Hood" and not let the Wolf eat Grandmother? Some versions of the story let her

escape unharmed. Miss Shedlock is of the opinion that children often accept the death idea in a story as a natural phenomenon. Perhaps it is easier to accept death as an experience that comes to all wild creatures, or as the result of treachery, or as the ultimate fate of a hero. If the storyteller learns from experience that her audience cannot cope with the emotions aroused by the tale in which a prominent character dies, then that type of story should not be told.

Stories that tend to develop a sense of humor, however, should be used. A subtle sense of humor develops gradually, and is not to be expected in the normal small child. Horseplay and practical jokes are all too common and need no encouragement by means of the educational procedure. The adult prankster's sense of humor is still in the lowest stages of development.

Many of the old folk tales that children love are those that tickle the funny bone. The value of humor lies in more than just the "tickling." Marie Shedlock tells us that humor "in-

culcates a sense of proportion....shows a child his real position in the universe and prevents an exaggerated idea of his own importance.... shortens the period of horseplay and practical jokes..."⁴⁷ A sense of humor enables the child to get the point of view of another person. A sense of humor also teaches a child at an early age not to expect too much (of life).

The very small child normally has a poorly developed sense of humor. Pure fun, obvious situations, elementary jokes are at first his understanding of humor. He laughs at Jack and Jill because Jack "broke his crown." Lear's nonsense rhymes please him immensely. As his sense of humor grows more subtle, he can appreciate the type of humor found in the Alice books.

Stories to Avoid

It has been mentioned above that stories of death should be avoided if the audience reacts unfavorably to them. Also to be avoided are stories which deal with analysis of motives and feelings. Children lack the ability to psychoanalyze. Stories which deal with too

47. Shedlock, page 136.

much sarcasm and satire are dangerous weapons in the hands of children. Too much of the trust and belief in human beings is sacrificed by exposing children to such stories. This trust and belief are traits that are essential to a happy childhood. Children are naturally kinder and more sympathetic than adults and should be helped to preserve these qualities rather than have them perverted. Miss Shedlock mentions "The Butterfly," by Hans Christian Andersen , as an example of a fairy tale not suitable for telling to children.

Children care very little for the sentimental story. Although they crave sensation in the abstract, most children fear it in the concrete; so strong sensational episodes should not be part of the storyteller's repertoire. Matters quite outside the children's interest, unless wrapped in mystery should not be presented.

Also, stories of brutality, exaggerated and coarse fun may have a certain appeal for some children. Children of the poorer classes are exposed to much that is ugly and coarse and should

have an opportunity to hear stories on a higher level.

Early stories for children contained much that would be considered priggish today. These stories have little appeal to children who have had opportunities to hear much from the best literature written for them.

Most certainly the storyteller should avoid stories of infant piety and deathbed scenes. A recent Reader's Digest recounted a story of a teacher who tried to impress upon her small pupils the importance of avoiding colds. She told them a story about a small nephew who played in the snow with his new sled until he was quite wet and cold, a condition which resulted in pneumonia and death. At the conclusion of the story a small hand went up, and one child inquired, "What happened to his sled?" Children need to think of living, not of dying. Perhaps no teacher would resort to such stories, or to any of the pious stories of the early nineteenth century, for the purpose of instilling desirable habits and attitudes in

her pupils' minds today.

It is probably unwise to give children tales containing a mixture of fairy lore and science. The true fairy story should not be hampered by compromise of probability; scientific representation needs no supernatural aid.

CHAPTER 5

TECHNIQUES OF STORYTELLING

Each storyteller must find her own best way of becoming acquainted with, preparing and presenting her story. However, a few general principles, if kept in mind, will start the beginner off on the right path. Memorizing is a doubtful path for the average teacher-storyteller. It is dangerous and time consuming. If memory fails, an awkward pause follows while the storyteller gropes for the right words. "Stories must be acquired by....contemplation, by bringing the imagination to work, constantly, intelligently upon them."⁴⁸ They must be so thoroughly learned that forgetting is an impossibility. Miss Sawyer tells us that all are born with the power of creative imagination. During childhood this power abounds; but somewhere in middle childhood adjustment to a factual world dulls this power and most adults must put forth supreme effort to call it back to its full power. Regaining this creative power (what the successful storyteller must have) can come only through

48. Sawyer, page 142.

discipline of the mind. Discipline means fixing the mind upon the object or idea to be thought about and keeping it there, meditating upon it until it is fully comprehended. This means keeping the mind upon a story steadily, and long enough so that the story is known, felt, ⁴⁹and made real. Such discipline comes only with experience.

Selection and Preparation

The first point to be considered is the selection of the story to be told. Never read aloud or tell a story you do not like. You must sincerely appreciate the style and content of the story. Perhaps one cannot love all the stories, but appreciation is not too much to expect. If a story is loved and appreciated, it will not be rattled off as if it were the work of a talking machine.

Read to yourself first to know and enjoy the story. Read it slowly, fixing your mind firmly upon it, thinking intensely so that all the details are shaped in your mind. Let the story pass before you incident by incident like

49. Ibid., page 119.

a series of moving pictures. Several readings may be necessary to make the performance seem real. Read aloud leisurely, noting the special vocabulary, if any, noting the unusual turn of a phrase, the dialogue, and repetitional phrases. Then tell the story aloud, book in hand, referring to the book when memory fails.

Repeat the dialogue until it is fluent, and you are the speaking characters. Make it sound not only like the story, but like you. Put all the reality and warmth in it that you can. A very effective procedure is the use of the tape recorder; listening to one's self critically can bring to light many deficiencies. Tell the story, always aloud, returning to use of the book whenever necessary. Miss Arbuthnot suggests telling the story in bed, in the morning, on the bus, at every opportunity, until nothing can disturb the telling.

Polish the beginning and ending of your story. Let the beginning establish the mood. Announce your story, pause just long enough for a deep breath, then begin. The younger

the audience, the more advisable it is to get into the story quickly. Get the "bean" to growing as soon as possible is Miss Woutrina⁵⁰ Bone's advice.

Miss Bone gives the following examples of simple but pleasing beginnings:

"Once upon a time...."

"Well, once there was...."

"Once upon a time, it wasn't in my time, and it wasn't in your time, and it wasn't in⁵¹ anyone else's time...."

These beginnings suit small listeners and lead directly into the action. The classic favorite stories of childhood capture the attention of the children immediately. Such tales open compellingly, introducing the hero in the first sentence, or soon thereafter. The opening sentences of "Boots and his Brothers" quoted below promise interesting adventure, and the children sense at once that Boots will meet with some exciting happenings.

"Once upon a time there was a man who had three sons, Peter, Paul, and John. John was

50. Woutrina A. Bone, Children's Stories and How to Tell Them (New York, 1924), pages 62-63.

51. Ibid., page 64.

Boots, of course, for he was the youngest."⁵²

For swift movement from the beginning to the action of the story, the following lines from Andersen's "Tin Soldier" furnish a good example:

"There were once five and twenty tin soldiers, all brothers, for they were the offspring of the same old tin spoon. Each man shouldered his gun, kept his eyes well to the front, and wore the smartest red and blue uniform imaginable."⁵³

Another swiftly moving beginning is the first sentence from the old favorite, "The Tinder Box":

"A soldier came marching along the high-road. One! Two! One! Two!"⁵⁴

No more squirming! All eyes and ears are concentrating on the words of the storyteller, for surely exciting happenings will follow.

A leisurely descriptive opening rarely attracts attention. Long descriptive passages are confusing to small children in any part of the story and may cause them to lose interest.

52. Johnson, Scott, and Sickels, pages 188-190. The story, "Boots and His Brothers" is from Popular Tales from the Norse, by Peter Christen Asbjornsen.

53. Ibid., pages 440-443.

54. Ibid., pages 443-446. "The Tinder Box" is from Andersen's Fairy Tales, translated by Mrs. Edgar Lucas.

Description should be woven into the story, if possible, by means of descriptive words. Rose-Red, Yaller-Dog, Lion-Heart, One-Eye, and Half-Chick give the child enough description for him to make his own picture.

If the opening sentences do not seem to suit the audience which is to be captivated by the particular story, polish them, revise them until they do suit. Select your beginning with the listeners in mind.

Endings as well as beginnings should be carefully chosen. Endings should leave the listeners completely satisfied. For children the often repeated endings of the old folk tales are unequaled.

"They all lived happily ever after."

"And they may be living there now for all I know."

"That is the last I saw of them."

Revise the ending if it seems wise; vary the finishing phrases and watch the reaction of the audience to see the effect.

Perhaps now is the time to suggest that if

a full-sized book is being read, a portion at a time, always leave off at a place in the story carefully chosen to make the listeners await the next installment eagerly.

Stories must sometimes be cut or edited, sometimes rearranged to suit the needs of an audience. If adaptation is necessary, or advisable, it is important to analyze the story carefully with the following questions in mind: ⁵⁵

1. What happens in the story?
2. What is the important action?
3. Who are the necessary characters?
4. What is the climax?

Condense the story by eliminating secondary threads, extra personages, some description, and irrelevant details or events. Keep to the logical sequence, a single point of view, simple language, and to the point at the end. It might be well to write out a skeleton of the story and work on that framework until the details are filled in satisfactorily through oral practice.

Presentation of the Story

Now that the story has been well prepared, with a satisfactory beginning and ending, the storyteller has laid the groundwork for presentation. Enjoy the story and enjoy telling it. The charm and delight that lie in storytelling come from the sharing of a pleasurable experience. Use the style that is suitable to the story. Uncle Remus' stories must be kept in the dialect in which they were written. The Greek myths need clear, dignified, simple and direct style. Stories of the Arabian Nights should be dressed gorgeously, with plenty of description. The folk tales are plentifully supplied with such expressions as goody, pate, spindle, and fagot, which may baffle the youngest children unless some explanation is made. The easiest way is to paraphrase casually as you tell: as, "Goody, the good wife...." Do not omit the use of such terms. Language has its own charms. The unfamiliar, obsolete, rural, or little-used words of the folk tale which seem to puzzle small children are part of the flavor of the

story. If the unusual phrase is essential to the meaning of the story, clear up the meaning before starting the story. With older children Miss Arbuthnot suggests putting the new terms on the chalkboard and spending a few minutes discussing them. Never interject modern phrases or colloquialisms into a fairy tale. "Boots got real mad" does not belong in the setting of the folk or fairy tale any more than such an expression belongs in a well-written modern story.

Never talk down to children. Never use patronizing, saccharine, or unctuous tones. Children are quick to sense artificiality, insincerity, and patronage; a normal child resents such attitudes.

Never appear to hurry. A sense of relaxation and leisure should be felt by all. Sit, if possible, with small children. It is more informal. Looks are of little consequence to the listener. It is advisable, however, to avoid any items of dress that might distract the audience. Fiddling with beads or jewelry, crossing and uncrossing the knees, or putting hands in and

out of pockets may invite restlessness in the children. Good posture is as important now as at any time in the classroom. Sitting or standing in a sloppy manner is inexcusable.

Let gestures be natural, not dramatic. Use them sparingly. Large dramatic gestures, elaborate pantomime, or affectation have no place in storytelling. Genuine enjoyment, a twinkle in the eye, sudden gravity, a warning frown should come from natural enjoyment of the story. Expressions of the face are more effective than large gestures. The feeling within makes the teller a flexible instrument. A twinkle in the eye is not put there by practicing in front of a mirror.

Other small artifices or techniques may be used to create or hold interest. A change in intonation makes for suspense in the story of "The Three Bears." It is a simple matter to vary the pitch to give Father Bear his "rough, gruff voice," Mother Bear her "middle-sized voice," and Baby Bear his "little, wee voice." Mimicry and imitating animals' voices is espec-

ially effective with young children. The storyteller should not hesitate to use it even if she is only fairly good at such imitations.

Small listeners love the pleasurable recurrence of certain phrases or sounds.

" 'Good day, my good people, and thanks for your kindness the last time we met,' said the hare." This greeting is repeated over and over in the folk tale "The Ram and the Pig Who Went into the Woods",⁵⁶ and is soon being whispered by the children as the storyteller repeats it. Similarly, the little folks love to repeat, "On Little Drumkin! Tum-pa! Tum-too!"⁵⁷ from the story "The Lambkin", and "When I have given the slip to Goody Poody, and the good-man, and the seven squalling children....",⁵⁸ after hearing them several times in the story. Such repetitions are basic to the charm of these old favorites.

In retelling a story the approach may be varied. Tell the story in the first person, or plunge into the action in the middle of the story, then recapitulate. These artifices give a new spice to the telling.

56. Johnson, Scott, and Sickels, pages 292-294.

57. Hollowell, pages 93-94.

58. Arbuthnot, Anthology, page 72.

Another useful artifice which the storyteller may find effective is the pause. Skillful use can be learned through experience. In the following example, quoted from Marie Shedlock's The Art of the Storyteller, it is easy to understand the effectiveness of the pause. One may say, "And then the King went to the door, and at the door stood a real Princess," or "And then the King went to the door, and at the door stood (Pause.) a real Princess."⁵⁹

Children's unconscious curiosity expresses itself in sudden muscular tensions. The use of the pause should be varied according to the age, number, and mood of the audience.

The storyteller must concern herself not only with what is said, but how it is said. The voice is the instrument of the storyteller.⁶⁰ "Good enunciation is the stamp of culture."

Children should not be expected to listen for hours on end to a thin voice, a voice badly registered, a monotonous voice, a voice that does not carry, one sagging with fatigue, or one pitched too high. Miss Sawyer says that

59. Shedlock, page 33. Quoted from Hans Christian Andersen's "The Princess and the Pea."

60. Sawyer, page 138.

the majority of Americans are lazy-eared and that they surely do not listen to themselves or they would not use such excruciating and ineffective voices, enunciating so badly and slurring their words. If your voice is not satisfying, take steps to improve it. Intelligence and practice will result in accomplishing specific improvements in the voice.

Listen to a tape recording of your own voice in conversation, reading aloud, telling a story. Listen to recordings by some of the best actors and actresses, or listen to radio and television personalities and try to determine just what are the qualities that make their voices so effective. The satisfying voice is well ~~modulated~~⁶¹, clear, quiet, melodious and cheerful. Variations in tone give it color. Bess Porter Adams suggests practicing with the piano, speaking nonsense syllables up and down the scale until the voice becomes flexible. Variations of at least an octave are desirable. May Hill Arbuthnot also suggests speaking with the piano to determine the

61. Adams, page 319.

key of the voice, then working to lower it a key or so if it seems more agreeable. Women have a tendency to pitch their voices too high.

Recognize your faults and face them. Relax the entire body, and you relax the voice. Leave personal worries and fears outside the classroom. Relaxation solves many voice problems.

Speaking too rapidly may result in many children losing words and becoming weary with the strain of trying to follow the ideas which pass too quickly. Speaking too slowly makes⁶² them sleepy and indifferent. A well-modulated pace is necessary. Again, relaxation is the key. Accelerating the voice to accompany accelerated action in the story, slowing the tempo to heighten suspense and a sense of mystery, quickening the pace to increase excitement: these are variations that can be used to obtain good effects.

For good control, the breath must come from the diaphragm, not from the upper chest. Reading from Shakespeare or the Psalms is suggested by May Hill Arbuthnot if better control is needed.

62. Ibid., page 320.

Breathe deeply so as to sustain the voice and grow in richness and resonance. Shallow breathing makes the voice tired, thin, shrill, and sharp. Ruth Sawyer recommends breathing from "below the belt." Control the breath by abdominal muscles, not the throat. She also says control can be improved by "panting like a dog,"⁶³ keeping the breath coming and going in quick, staccato breaths until it can be done with a regular beat. Then control over the abdominal muscles has been achieved, likewise control of the breath.

Lessons with voice experts are not necessary for most teachers; but lessons can help. The teacher with serious voice problems should consult a specialist.

63. Sawyer, pages 134-135. Miss Sawyer gives a test for breath control on page 134, also other exercises for control on pages 135-136.

CHAPTER 6

WHEN TO TELL STORIES

In the preceding pages the emphasis has been on the WHY? WHAT? AND HOW? of storytelling. The next point to be considered is WHEN to tell stories in the classroom. With daily schedules being what they are most teachers find it very hard to find time for one more activity. The story hour need not be assigned to a definite hour by the clock as is necessary for the story hour at the public library or at Bible school. Any time is story time if the story has a definite purpose in relation to the educational program or meets a specific need at that specific time.

Often a play period leaves small children overheated, restless, excited and noisy. Such a time is a good time for a story, one that will relax and quiet the children and leave them in a mood conducive to moving on into the more formal school activity planned for the day. Perhaps the story may be chosen for its relation to the learnings that will follow, for instance; it might pre-

cede a language activity involving writing short stories, poems, or just simple sentences. Little folks often have a need just to "write about something that I like" and the story hour may be the stimulus for such activities in language. The story need not be told for that specific purpose, but worthwhile language activities are often based on stories the children have heard or read.

Sometimes there is a long, dull wait for the children to be weighed, measured, to have their teeth checked, or for some other matter which is part of the school's routine. If the teacher has a magic bag of stories this is an opportune time to pull out one. A story can be told in the time it might take to locate a suitable one in a book.

Small feuds arise during play periods, on the way to school, and even during classroom activities. If two boys are about to break up a beautiful friendship (temporarily, of course), the feeling between them may be strong enough that it disrupts the classroom for an entire morning. Carolyn Sherwin Bailey cites an ex-

64
ample of such an incident. The old story "The Pot and the Kettle" was called into use in this instance and a peaceful, happy atmosphere was restored when the boys decided that neither the pot nor the kettle could call the other black. Probably the regularly scheduled work for that hour was postponed for a few minutes, but surely the delay was justified.

Situations arise in which children are sad, discouraged, afraid or otherwise temporarily upset. The feeling can be sensed, as it pervades the entire group on occasions. If such a situation arises in the primary classroom, THEN is the time for the story, regardless of other work planned for that hour. During a recent Civil Defense alert, although the children had been informed calmly beforehand as to what it was all about and there seemed to be no cause for concern, yet a tenseness was evident from the facial expressions of the quiet children. An "everybody talk" session following the return to the classroom cleared the air and a story simply for amusement paved the way for an hour of regular classroom activity.

Another time when story time may set the stage for the next activity in the day's routine might be the time when a new unit of stories in the basic reader is to be introduced. The teacher may give the children a preview of the stories which they are going to read in the next few days. Then she may tell them another story related to the unit. If the group of new stories is about pets, perhaps the teacher may tell the story "How Man Made a Friend" which tells how Dog first made a mutual pact with Man, and how henceforth Man and Dog were friends, while Wolf remained Man's enemy. After hearing the story the children are eager to start reading other stories about pets for themselves.

Even in the science period, not only in the primary grades, but in others as well, many stories can be told that not only build background, but also add to the appreciation of our world of science. Biographies of great scientists are rich in adventure. Dr. Alexis Carrel, the great French specialist, once said that some day an artist would weave a tale concerning the circulation of

the blood which would equal the Arabian Nights in its fascination.⁶⁵ That bit of prophecy has come true, as anyone who has seen the story of "Hemo, the Magnificent," recently televised, will verify. Primary children were fascinated by the tale and doubtless will recall it when they study the circulatory system in later science classes.

The longings and imaginings of the race have foreshadowed all modern inventions. The Panama Canal and other engineering feats of today are monuments to the dreams of long ago. The telegraph, the telephone, the radio have made old tales come true. Madam Curie's discovery of radium has brought the "magic healing substance" from fairy⁶⁶ lore into real life.

Special days are ideal times for stories to be told. The library shelves are rich in stories of holidays, stories of the heroes and famous men and women of our country, whose birthday anniversaries we observe each year in some school activity.

The storyteller need not wait for a special day, however. Any day is the day for a story. Any time is story time. Every teacher can be a storyteller.

65. Katherine Dunlap Cather, Educating by Storytelling (Yonkers-on-Hudson, 1919), page 181.

66. J. Berg Esenwein and Marietta Stockard, Children's Stories and How to Tell Them (Springfield, Massachussetts, 1917), pages 10-11.

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